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Senator Dianne Feinstein

of California

Senator Feinstein Calls on EPA to Maintain Rules Protecting Communities from Radioactive Waste

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Washington, DC – U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) is urging the Environmental Protection Agency today to maintain strong regulations governing radioactive waste that would prevent its disposal in local landfills.

In a letter to EPA Administrator Michael Leavitt, Senator Feinstein requested that the EPA reverse its decision to examine changes in rules surrounding 'low-activity' radioactive waste. Currently, wastes that contain nuclear and toxic residues must be managed and stored in specially-equipped, licensed facilities. Medical centers, research labs, and industrial generators are typical sources of 'low-activity' radioactive material which can pose harm to people and the environment. EPA's action could ultimately lead to a roll-back of hard-won community safeguards.

The following is the text of Senator Feinstein's letter:

"I write to express my concern over the recent action taken by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in issuing the Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking: Improving the Safe Management and Disposal of 'Low-Activity' Radioactive Wastes.

By issuing this Advanced Notice, you have created an opportunity for regulations governing the management and disposal of 'low-activity' radioactive to be rolled back. Radioactive waste, if not stringently regulated, could be disposed of in facilities that are neither designed for nor licensed to accept such materials, to the detriment of our environment and the health of our citizens.

The type of radioactive materials that would be affected by any change in the current regulations is significant. And although the Environmental Protection Agency has given assurances that the wastes under review contain only small amounts of radioactive material, these assurances are unpersuasive in the face of the high risk of potential harm to the health and safety of Americans and our environment.

In 1992, a similar effort by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to deregulate low-activity radioactive waste was blocked by Congress, prompted both by public outcry and Congressional concern about losing control over radioactive waste. That concern has not abated in the intervening ten years.

Currently, oversight of the disposal of low-activity radioactive wastes is monitored by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the Department of Energy, the Environmental Protection Agency, and state governments. It is imperative for these entities to maintain strong oversight over all types of radioactive waste.

I respectfully request that you reverse the Environmental Protection Agency's controversial decision to examine the possibility of changing the regulations surrounding 'low-activity' radioactive waste."